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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the High School Development Center, an alternative school in Detroit, Michigan, is to provide educational opportunities for 300 students identified as unsuccessful by principals of five high schools. Students in grades 9 and 10 are selected for the program if they exhibit two of the following: (1) very low academic achievement; (2) poor attendance; and (3) behavior problems. Evaluation of the Center was accomplished by analyzing and comparing trends in the number of violations of the Student Code of Conduct, attendance, and academic achievement of students at the Center with a carefully selected control group at the home schools, and by surveying students, parents, and teachers. This document presents a summary of the evaluation. Conclusions include the following: (1) no improvement was perceived in the safety and school climate at the home schools as a result of removing the students sent to the Center; (2) Center students showed greater improvement in academic achievement; (3) attendance rates for Center students decreased, while rates for the control group increased; and (4) the rate of Code of Conduct violations for Center students was lower than the rate for the control group. Responses from staff, students and parents were incorporated into a list of 11 recommendations for program improvement. (FMW)

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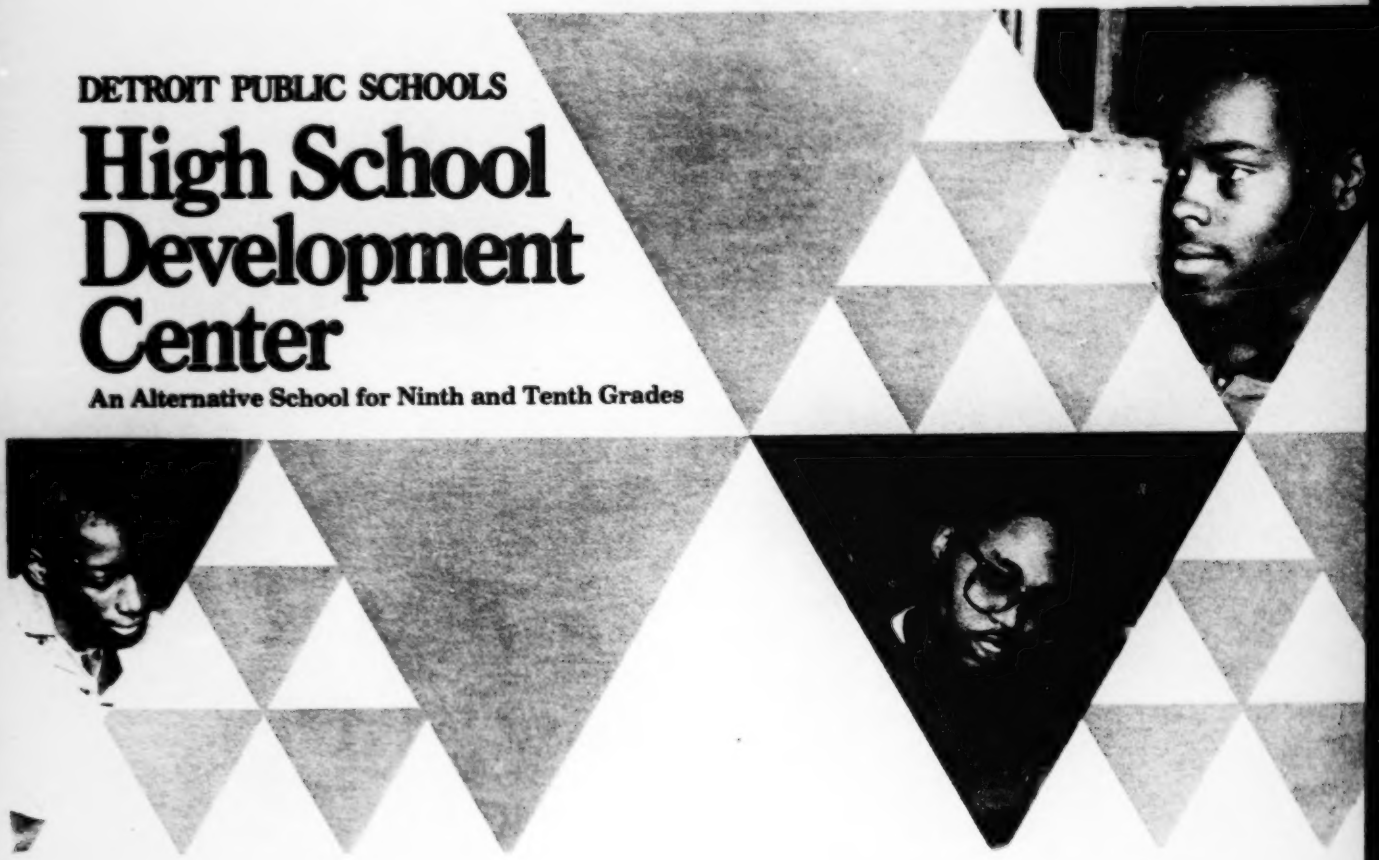
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1986-87

DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

High School Development Center

An Alternative School for Ninth and Tenth Grades



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HIGH SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

(Executive Summary)

PURPOSE AND FEATURES

The purpose of the High School Development Center is to provide alternative educational opportunities for 300 students identified as unsuccessful by principals of five high schools. Students in grades 9 and 10 are selected for the program if they exhibit at least two of the following characteristics: very low achievement, poor attendances, and behavior problems. The Development Center is to provide students with the social, academic, and coping skills necessary for success in the regular school programs to which they will be returned.

Program features included reduced class size (15-20 students), individualized instruction, staff and parent workshops, and services from on-site counselors and a social worker. Follow-up counseling services are provided to students upon their return to a regular high school program.

The purpose of this study is to assess the degree of student success both in the center and after enrollment in a regular high school program. Results are to be used by the central and school staff members for purposes of program planning.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the High School Development Center was designed to answer the three major research questions stated below:

1. Did the safety and school climate at the home schools improve as a result of removing the students sent to the High School Development Center?

2. How did students in the High School Development Center do with respect to scholastic achievement, attendance and citizenship when compared to a control group?

3. What perceptions of the High School Development Center are held by staff, students and parents and what are their recommendations for the center?

The question of "What happens to the students when they leave the center?" is one which can only be completely addressed in June 1988, one year after the conclusion of student participation in the center.

In order to answer the first question, the numbers of violations of the Student Code of Conduct made by students in the home schools were compared for the 1985-86 and 1986-87 school years. Because of a change in reporting procedures and data maintenance in the Code of Conduct Office and the Data Processing

Department, comparable data for the two time periods were available only for two schools. These data were compared for differences. In addition, a questionnaire designed to ascertain perceptions of change was administered to a sample of staff and students in two home high schools.

To answer the second research question, a control group of 50 students deemed comparable to participating students was selected by the counselors from two, non-participating high schools. These students' pre and post attendance and subject marks were compared with corresponding data for students in the High School Development Center.

Number of days absent and report card grades were collected from the 1985-86 and 1986-87 report cards and/or Form 80C's of experimental and control group students. Pre data were subjected to a t-test of statistical significance. When pre data were found to be comparable, t-test were performed on post data. In addition, 1986-87 student Code of Conduct data were collected for the High School Development Center and the five home high schools. These data were compared to ascertain differences.

The third research question was answered through the use of instruments containing items related to the perceptions held by staff, students and parents of the High School Development Center and Development Center in-service activities. A statement of each objective and the status of attainment appears in the next section of the report.

FINDINGS

Research Question #1

Did the safety and school climate at the home schools improve as a result of removing the students sent to the High School Development Center?

Data show a decrease from 1985-86 to 1986-87 in the number of Student Code of Conduct violations at the two home high schools for which comparable data were available. The total number of suspensions and administrative transfers decreased from 2,751 in 1985-86 to 1,455 in 1986-87 representing a change of -1,296 violations. It must be noted that changes in reporting procedures and/or criteria for reporting can offset real gains or losses in numbers of infractions.

Responses from a sample of staff and students in the two home high schools indicated that, overall, their perceptions were that the climate did not change. In response to a survey of 34 items, there were only 6 items (18%) for which at least 80% of the staff indicated moderate to great improvement and only 1 item (4%) for which at least 80% of the students indicated moderate to great improvement. Both staff and students agreed that moderate to great improvement had been made in the area of student attendance.

Research Question #2

How did students in the High School Development Center do with respect to scholastic achievement, attendance, and Student Code violations when compared to a control group?

Development Center students in both Grades 9 and 10 showed increase in mean grade point averages (G.P.A.) from the first semester of the 1985-86 school

year to the first semester of the 1986-87 school year and from the second semesters of the respective years. In all cases, a comparison of changes of experimental students' G.P.A.'s with changes of those of the control group proved to be statistically significant at the .05 level in favor of the experimental (Development Center) group. Specifically, from first semester 1986 to first semester 1987, Grade 9 experimental students' mean G.P.A.'s changed from .64 to 1.74; control students changed from .74 to .72. Grade 10 experimental students changed from .74 to 1.59; control from .76 to .93. Second semester changes were: Grade 9 experimental from .20 to 1.24; control from .42 to .67. Grade 10 experimental from .49 to 1.63; control from .44 to .84. Statistical data are presented on Table 3 in the full report.

Changes in days absent for Grade 9 and 10 students show decreases which are statistically significant at the .05 level when compared with changes in control group absenteeism. In fact, while the experimental group decreased number of days absent, the control group increased. Table 5 in the full report presents specific statistical data.

There were seven (7) Code of Conduct violations made by the 300 members of the experimental group. This results in a rate of violations of 1 per 43 students. The data show that there were 5,273 violations made by the 15,075 members of the control group. This is a rate of 1 violation per 3 students. The rate of violations was lower for the experimental group.

The data on attitudes between control and experimental students was not available.

Research Question #3

What perceptions of the High School Development Center are held by the staff, students and parents and what are their recommendations for the center?

Table 8-13 in the full report present data related to the perceptions of various aspects of the Development Center held by staff, students and parents, Overall, a majority of the staff held negative perceptions of the majority of aspects of the Development Center for which their opinions were solicited. Students indicated more positive perceptions than did staff although there were only 21 of 31 items (68%) upon which 80% or more of the student respondents indicated positive perceptions. Parents indicated extremely positive perceptions of the program. Both staff and parents indicated positive perceptions of in-service training.

Staff, students and parents all felt that small class size and concerned and competent teachers and administrators were particular strengths of the program. Staff indicated weaknesses including lack of supplies and equipment and lack of planning time. Students indicated the lack of girls and the distance from home among weaknesses. Parents indicated counselors' need for telephones and the need for more parent participation. They also indicated that students should be assigned more homework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

a. Because of the structure of the citywide testing program, the Development Center does not use a nationally normed test. Such

testing should be conducted in the 1987-88 school year to verify the Grade Point Average achievement gains noted in this report. The California Achievement Tests Form E should be used.

b. Reevaluate curriculum content to ensure that each student is optimally challenged in class.

c. Increase the use of individualized instruction and alternative teaching methodologies to help students in the content areas and to better prepare them for the regular high school.

d. Staff in each center should review this reports' findings and recommendations and develop implementation strategies for same.

Recommendations based on the evaluator's observations and communication with the staff of each center include:

a. Efforts should be made to insure that the principals of the sending schools forward students' records as soon as possible. Efforts should also be made to assure that the Referral Form is sent to the centers with all requested information completed.

b. Efforts should be made to insure that target staff (administrators, support staff, teachers, and school service assistants) are completely aware of the objectives of the program for the school year 1987-88.

c. Efforts should be made by the total staff to infuse reading skills in the content areas of English, social studies, science and, in fact, the entire curriculum.

d. Efforts should be made to put more emphasis on Parent Training to maximize the many and important effects that parents have upon their children's learning with respect to the home environment and the acquisition of skills.

e. Efforts should be made to heighten staff awareness of the research on Effective Schools especially as it relates to the importance of high expectations for student performance.

f. Students returned to regular high schools should continue to receive additional support services including social work services and special counseling.

g. Efforts should be made to further study the "Selection Criteria" and make recommendations for change when appropriate.